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SUBJECT: ZIMBABWEANS OPTING FOR MORE REMOTE BORDER CROSSINGS

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¶1. (U) Poloff met on 12/10 with a Zimbabwean refugee in Mozambique, currently working for an NGO dealing largely with refugee issues. The contact said that while the largest border between Zimbabwe and Mozambique (Mutare/Machipanga in Manica province) has received the most attention since visa requirements between the two countries were dropped last month, many Zimbabweans are opting for the remote border crossing at Eduardo Mondlane in northwestern Gaza Province. He further asserted that "thousands" of Zimbabweans used this crossing in the past year: it is not as dangerous as crossing the crocodile-infested river border with South Africa or as strictly controlled as the Mutare/Machipanga crossing.

¶2. (U) The refugee asserted that under the auspices of his NGO work, he has spoken with Zimbabweans who traveled by bus through the Gonarezhou National Park in Zimbabwe to the border with Mozambique. Once in Mozambique, some opt to cross into South Africa via Kruger Park, while most board the train to Maputo. A small percentage of Zimbabweans stay in Maputo and get jobs as English teachers or with international NGOs, but according to the contact most cross into Swaziland (which has no visa requirements) or into South Africa via Ponta d'Ouro, on Mozambique's extreme southern border. The Zimbabweans who choose to stay in Mozambique do not register with UNHCR because they are typically well-educated and believe they would have a better life working illegally in Maputo than if they lived at the Marratane refugee camp in Nampula Province, where UNHCR would likely send them.

¶3. (SBU) COMMENT: The "discovery" of this third option for Zimbabweans entering Mozambique is significant. The Mutare/Machipanga crossing is presently the busiest crossing, with more than 500 Zimbabweans crossing daily into Mozambique since the dropping of visa requirements in November, while the Cuchamano border crossing in Tete Province is a likely path for those hoping to reach English-speaking Malawi. NGOs estimate the majority of those crossing now at those two posts involve "day visitors" gathering food and other supplies not readily available in Zimbabwe. Those using the crossing at Eduardo Mondlane, however, are more likely refugees, taking advantage of Mozambique's porous borders and using the country as a transit point to reach South Africa. If the situation in Zimbabwe deteriorates further, this route at Eduardo Mondlane may become as heavily used as the Mutare/Machipanga crossing.

Chapman